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*Macquarie University Sculpture Park: promoting its value
to ensure its continued development*

Introduction

There are four key words used in the theme of this year's conference – making university museums and collections known, visible, accessible, and useful. Achieving these goals will secure the future of university museums and collections. Exposure and promotion leads to longevity.

The Macquarie University Sculpture Park is well exposed, partly by its nature as an outdoor museum, and more importantly, by its successful public program. University sculpture parks in Australia may be few in number, but they are recognized by their institutions as serving the important purpose of creating a cultural space on campus. Commenting on the Sculpture Park, Macquarie's Vice Chancellor, Prof. Di Yerbury has stated, „The sculptures are intended as a complement to our physical environment. Equally they are meant to complement our intellectual environment”¹.

The creation of the Sculpture Park, campus wide, has transformed Macquarie into an environment where intellect and aesthetics are combined. Exposure of this resource is achieved through a successful public program titled Sculpture Under the Stars – twilight tours of the Macquarie University Sculpture Park, held every February and November.

¹ D. Yerbury, VC message, *Sculpture Park Booklet*, Macquarie University, Sydney 1992, unpaginated.

Sculpture Walk, Sculpture Park and Sculpture Collection – some definitions

The exhibition of sculptures in a museum setting has traditionally been in isolation, for example, one piece interspersed amongst a group of paintings in a gallery space; or one piece featured in an outdoor courtyard. This isolated phenomenon is being superseded by a trend of displaying sculptures en masse in the natural and built environments.

There appears to be three defining terms used when describing this type of sculpture exhibiting. The first, a 'sculpture walk', refers to a number of sculptures exhibited both indoor and outdoor, on public display, and indicated by numbered positions on a reference map or diagram. A sculpture walk is more likely to present sculpture in isolation from one another, and suggests movement from one sculpture to the next without necessarily being able to view numerous sculptures one time. This presents viewers with a more systematic approach dictated by the numerical system of placement, forcing the viewer to follow a suggested path between two or more sculptures, and therefore constructing relationships between those works for them. Secondly, a 'sculpture park' refers to a larger number of sculptures exhibited, usually outdoors, individually and in group displays. In a sculpture park, the ability to exhibit groupings of sculptures, where many can be viewed at once within the landscape, creates a sculpture display that does not impose curatorial direction upon the observer – viewers can experience sculptures by chance and construct their own interpretation as well as form relationships between two or more sculptures encountered in a random manner. Thirdly, a 'sculpture collection' refers to a group of sculptures, indoor or outdoor, but not necessarily on public display.

Sculpture exposed

The profile of sculpture in Australian society has been increased by the fashionable inclusion of sculpture in many contemporary architectural designs. However, the approach to sculpture exhibition in public spaces has remained singular. The increase of sculpture parks (also known as sculpture gardens) in the last 50 years offers the public access to groupings of a variety of sculptures. Sculpture is best appreciated *in situ* as opposed to virtual viewing through photographs or websites. A valuable cultural and educational experience is gained from the opportunity of observing first hand the size, scale, and placement of a piece in its chosen landscape; the visual, tactile sensation of its surface and shape; and the ability to move around the work observing its changes in mass and void.

European countries were the seminal thinkers in this concept of purpose built sculpture parks/gardens. One of the earliest sculpture gardens, the Vigeland Sculpture Park, in Oslo, Norway, was developed in 1924². Many sculpture parks/gardens have been devised and instigated over the last century, with great variety in size and focus,

² D. Yerbury, 1992, *op.cit.*

some being palatial grounds of undulating acres of grass, woodland and water features, such as the Storm King Art Centre, New York, purchased in 1960, to create an open air sculpture garden³. Others are more topographically challenging such as Hokone Open Air Museum in Japan, at the foothills of Mount Fujiyama which opened in 1969⁴.

Australian sculpture parks differ somewhat from those in other countries:

„(...) whereas most of the European, Japanese and American sculpture gardens have been designed by landscape architects, their Australian counterparts have generally been developed in already existing gardens or parkland settings, and are almost invariably of the informal, naturalistic style”⁵.

Access to sculpture has therefore increased, and a revival in its appreciation and knowledge of its value as an art form has followed. Despite sculpture's limitations in size and weight, cost of materials and lesser potential for sale, in comparison to two-dimensional artwork, the advent of the sculpture park/garden has presented contemporary society with a new cultural space.

The profile of sculpture parks in Australia is being further raised by transient events such as *Sculpture by the Sea* held annually at Bondi Beach in Sydney, NSW, since 1997, and Cottesloe Beach in Perth, WA, since early 2005. These temporary sculpture ‘expos’ generate great public and media interest, increasing the opportunity to view sculpture outside the confines of public museum and gallery spaces, and showcase both international and local sculptors. Other promoters of mass sculpture exhibits include sculpture societies, private collectors, commercial agents, and corporate organizations.

In company with other mass sculpture promoters are universities, a number of which in Australia have recognized the benefits of this approach.

Australian University Sculpture Parks

Many universities in Australia have substantial art collections that include sculptures. But few have chosen to display their sculptural works in a dedicated exhibition space such as a park or garden. This is mainly due to landscape and architectural constraints within the layout of the campus.

„Most Australian universities were founded or developed substantially during this [20th] century, modern works are dominant... university administrations readily install large abstract works in their grounds where they take on more organic properties than those in city plazas”⁶.

The University of New South Wales is situated in a highly built-up environment in the heart of Sydney. It has very little open ground and much paving. Yet it has a sculpture walk, instigated by the founding Vice Chancellor, Sir Phillip Baxter, with the first sculpture commissioned in 1955. The walk shows 13 sculptures, exhibited

³ G. Sherman, Foreward [in:] K. Scarlett, 1993 *Contemporary Sculpture in Australian Gardens*, p. 9–11, G + B Arts International, Roseville, quote from p. 11.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ K. Scarlett, 1993, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁶ K. Scarlett, 1995. *Public Sculpture in Australia*, Craftsmans House, Roseville, quote from p. 84.

mostly in isolation from one another in various courtyards or entranceways to buildings, or in small garden settings:

„Baxter recognized that the incorporation of art into the built environment is necessary to lift the spirit and humanize what could otherwise be a brutal and soulless place. Public art, when successful, provides points for contemplation and by its very presence reminds a community of its cultural heritage. It provokes dialogue which may be either scornful, admiring or non-committal, but with discussion comes ideas and an opening of minds – the very purpose of a university education”⁷.

At the other end of the scale, the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra has the benefit of a more spacious, park-like campus. It has a collection of over 40 sculptures that are displayed across the campus amongst the buildings and in open space. A more recent addition in 2001, to the ANU sculpture collection, is a designated international sculpture section. The ANU art collection including sculpture, has been developed since the founding of the university in 1946, making ANU one of the first universities to approach sculpture display in this manner:

„(...) landscape design and sculpture were planned so as to create an integrated environment. Works of art in a place of learning also enhance the academic environment, because their presence demonstrates a culture that values creative thinking”⁸.

Wollongong University, situated south of Sydney, and founded in 1951, has also recognized the value in displaying their sculpture collection as a sculpture park.

Macquarie University took this display approach one step further by declaring the entire campus as a sculpture park, rather than designating part of the campus to sculpture exhibition. Established in 1992 by curator and sculptor Errol Davis, it began with 26 sculptures placed around the campus, some in solitary positions and others grouped together. It has since grown to a total of 94 works in the collection, an increase of over 360% in 13 years. Macquarie now has the largest university sculpture park in the southern hemisphere.

Although Macquarie is not alone in including sculptures in their art collection, its approach to exhibition of the sculptures, campus wide as a permanent feature, and large number of sculptures exhibited, makes Macquarie unique amongst other Australian universities. This is due to the foresight of the curator and his experience of and exposure to international sculpture parks. This display approach is assisted greatly by the nature of Macquarie's campus, located on 126 hectares at North Ryde, approximately 18 kilometres north-west of the Sydney central business district. The grounds are a combination of wide open spaces, wooded areas, a lake, and deliberate plantings of green belts in and amongst the buildings, lending itself to this type of sculpture placement. Stretching right across campus, the Park creates a fluid interaction between the sculptures and their surrounding landscapes and buildings:

„(...) some of these works are placed singly in isolated courtyards, outside the library, in foyers or on the edges of lawns, but the maximum impact is gained where sculptures have been placed in [a] compatible group”⁹.

⁷ Cf. http://www.artcollection.unsw.edu.au/sculpture_walk

⁸ Cf. <http://www.anu.edu.au/facilities/sculpture/about.html>

⁹ K. Scarlett, 1993, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

Following ANU and Macquarie's example, Edith Cowan University (ECU) launched a Sculpture Park at its Joondalup campus in April 2002, making it Western Australia's first designated University Sculpture Park. ECU has a substantial art collection of which sculpture featured strongly enough to warrant the decision to develop that area of the collection further by implementing a campus wide sculpture park and commissioning works to increase its size:

„Visiting a sculpture garden is a very different experience to visiting a gallery. Works can be viewed more easily from multiple perspectives; the spaces are generally without barriers; there are no constraints about touching the works; the open-air settings invite people to relax and contemplate the works”¹⁰.

Sculpture Parks – a valuable asset on campus

Like any university museum or collection, a sculpture collection is a valuable cultural asset. It provides a unique, unrestricted cultural space on campus and often highlights the aesthetic attributes of the built environment. The Sculpture Park caters for a wide audience ranging from fine arts and museums and cultural studies students, to staff and the general public. In addition, the profile of the university is increased within the arts and broader community. An outdoor sculpture collection is more accessible than indoor museums, which assists in providing opportunities for outreach via tours and workshops and interfacing with other creative outputs such as music and poetry.

Macquarie's Sculpture Park has developed a good reputation over this 13-year period, illustrated by the number of works that are on loan (15%) and donated (35%), because sculptors appreciate the exposure and benefit from listing on their curriculum vitae that their work is represented in the collection. This reputation has led to our staff being asked to advise other organisations on how to start their own sculpture collection. For example, the 'Friends of the Hawkesbury Art Collection' (a group of community members from western Sydney) have been in consultation with Macquarie Sculpture Park staff for over 12 months whilst they campaign their local council for funding to support a sculpture collection in their region.

Macquarie University wants its Sculpture Park to be known as accessible to all. Guided or self-guided tours of the Park have always been available. Unfortunately though this is not enough to engage the wider community within the University community. Location of the Park and how to access it are basic pieces of information that need greater exposure within the University's local and wider community.

Exposure – developing a specific public program

The University Art Gallery was established in 1999, which assisted in raising awareness of the Sculpture Park through developing joint events. The Art Gallery

¹⁰ Cf. <http://www.ecu.edu.au/vco/curatorial/exhibitions.html>

forms the central location to access or seek information on the Sculpture Park and Art Collection.

In 2002, despite a new detailed brochure of the Sculpture Park – which highlighted public interaction – as well as the availability of a virtual tour link on the main University Web page, the features of the park were not fully recognized by the broader community. Moreover, public accessibility to the park was also hampered by the incorrect assumption that access to the campus was limited to staff and students.

Sculpture Park staff launched a campaign in late 2002, to increase further the awareness of sculpture on campus. Considering the demographic and target audience, it was decided to offer free tours during twilight, titled *Sculpture Under the Stars*. This would ensure access to a wider group of people outside of normal school or working hours. Presenting the park at this time of day also gave those attending a chance to experience the sculptures in rapidly changing light conditions. This program allowed visitors to connect with the works on both an intellectual, social and physical level, in a more relaxed atmosphere than day-time viewing or through a virtual tour. A light supper was served before and after the tours to promote a casual and friendly discourse between the visitors and the staff, and gave the tours a feeling of ‘sophisticated’ entertainment.

After the success of the first and second season of twilight tours, an extra element was added to further entice visitors. Poetry readings were included during the tours adding a different creative dimension. The response was very positive – the atmosphere was enlivened by the recitals amongst the twilight lit sculptures, and the poets appreciated a different kind of ‘venue’ to voice their work in. Continuing on from the success of the fusion of poetry readings with sculpture appreciation, the November 2004 tour included music (acoustic and percussion instruments) and a performance by an opera singer.

Information such as sculptor, materials used, methods and anecdotal stories about the sculpture and its arrival to campus or people’s reaction/interaction with it is included in the tour commentary. This commentary has proved invaluable to the experience, which in turn encourages discussion amongst the audience forming a sociable occasion.

Sculpture Under the Stars tours have consistently increased in terms of visitor numbers (from an average of eight visitors on our first month of tours to an average of 15 on our last; the largest individual tour attracted 46 visitors) and we receive requests throughout the year from people wanting to know when the next tour is held.

Conclusion

The benefits to the University of opening their sculpture collection to a wide audience, by declaring the entire campus an open air museum, have been identified. Sculpture parks create cultural spaces that are unique to a specific landscape and present three-dimensional works in a positive, accessible, placement allowing for intellectual and aesthetic appreciation.

The value of the Sculpture Park as a cultural space on campus has been further highlighted by the introduction of the Twilight Tours. Exposure of the collection in this manner has cemented the access to the collection in the minds of the on campus and local community as a bi-annual event. This successful public program has also built

a stronger community outreach with the University's museums and collections through cross promotion – giving opportunities for the wider community to interact with the other campus collections.

To return to those four words from the conference theme – making collections known, visible, accessible, and useful, Macquarie University's Sculpture Park approach to collection display and implementation of a specific public program has succeeded in attaining these goals.

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STRESZCZENIE

Park Rzeźby Uniwersytetu Macquarie: propagowanie znaczenia Parku w celu zapewnienia jego stałego rozwoju

Korzyści oferowane przez muzea i zbiory uniwersyteckie studentom, pracownikom oraz szerszej społeczności były już wielokrotnie przedstawiane i omawiane. Istnieje ogromny potencjał muzeów i zbiorów uniwersyteckich zarówno dla osób z nich korzystających, jak i dla odpowiedzialnego za nie personelu. Mimo to, aby uznano i doceniono ten potencjał, musi być on widoczny w bardzo konkurencyjnym środowisku uniwersyteckim, gdzie muzea/zbiory, jednostki dydaktyczne i inne działy wykorzystują wszystkie sposoby, aby zdobyć wsparcie finansowe. Nawet Park Rzeźby nie został wyłączony z tych wymogów. Aby zapewnić jego stały rozwój, musi być znany i ceniony, zarówno w kampusie, jak i poza nim. Profil Parku jest kluczowy dla jego istnienia. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia rozwój parków rzeźby na uniwersytetach w Australii, a także prezentuje, w jaki sposób zapewniły one korzyści kulturowe i edukacyjne dla społeczności uniwersyteckich, jak i pozauniwersyteckich. Ponadto praca omawia i analizuje Park Rzeźby na Uniwersytecie Macquarie, śledząc jego rozwój i program publiczny, jaki przygotowano i wdrożono w celu zwiększenia świadomości istnienia Parku zarówno wśród społeczności uniwersyteckiej, jak i nieuniwersyteckiej.



II. I. *Grubbed* by James Rogers (steel), 1990 showing the park – like surrounds of the campus (photo by Michelle Eilson, CFL Macquarie University 2005)



II. II. Errol Davis, founder and curator of the Sculpture Park, giving a Twilight Tour (photo by Michelle Wilson, CFL Macquarie University 2005)